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SUPPLYING THE FARM LABOR NEED

**Organization, Cooperation, and the
Government's Interest**

**By G. I. CHRISTIE
Assistant to the Secretary
and
CLARENCE DuBOSE
Special Assistant**



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Supplying the Farm Labor Need.

Farm labor
stringency.

EVEN before the United States went into the war against the Hun, the farm labor problem had become serious. Farm wages were increasing steadily, and the difficulty of obtaining sufficient dependable help was becoming greater each season. Then last year, when the war situation impelled the Government to call upon the farmer for a greatly increased production of food crops, at the same time that hundreds of thousands of young men who might contribute the labor necessary to this increase were being rapidly drawn into manufacturing industries and a considerable number into the National Army, the farmer's problems seemed many times multiplied. In his dilemma he in turn appealed to the Government, through the Department of Labor and the Department of Agriculture, for assistance in obtaining farm labor.

This circular outlines some of the steps which the Department of Agriculture, in co-operation with many other agencies, has taken to ameliorate the difficulties faced by the farmers. The activities are discussed with a view to stimulating further organization.

County
Agents on
the job.

In the very nature of things "the Government" seems an abstract, impersonal thing to most people. But that is not the way the farmers feel toward the particular branch of Government with which they are concerned—the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Indeed, no single circumstance, probably, has contributed so much to the success of the Department of Agriculture's war program of increased food production as the fact that farmers in almost every county in the Nation call that Department "by its first name." That is to say, to most farmers the agricultural end of the Government is typified in the person of "Bill" or "Tom" or "Henry," or whatever his name may be—the County Agricultural Agent—a man they know—a man they see frequently—a man who is one of them—a man who practices what he preaches, and not only tells how to produce bigger and better crops but actually does so himself on farms which he uses for demonstrations in various parts of the county—a man who reaches the farmers in their fields and homes and presents the suggestions, the requests, the war programs of the Department.

THE COUNTY AGENT AND HIS WORK.

"Bill" and "Tom" and "Henry" were on the job before the war, of course, for this County Demonstration Agent system is one of the fundamental features of the Department of Agriculture's permanent work. But there are many more now than before the war—some 2,500 at present. In steadily increasing numbers since the war began they have been out in "tin lizzies,"

"traipsing" up and down the counties of these United States—Bill and Tom and Henry—telling the farmers, first of all, *why* more food must be produced, and then, if necessary, showing how to do it.

And more food has been produced—a fact made possible only by the patriotic response of the farmers to the suggestions made by the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, and the many other Federal, State, and local organizations.

RESPONSE OF THE FARMERS.

Last year the American farmers, in response to the war appeal, produced increased quantities of all food crops except wheat—and they planted plenty of wheat, but a combination of extraordinarily unfavorable conditions ruined a good deal of it. This year American farmers have planted the largest acreages of food crops in the history of the Nation. And these plantings represent the totals of many thousands of individual instances of the kind just suggested—a few more acres of corn here, a little extra wheat there, and a few more hogs over yonder. Bill and Tom and Henry are on the job!

Farmers
speeding up.

"All right," said the farmers, "we'll plant the limit! But don't forget, Bill, we've got to have labor to harvest the crops! Where'll we get it?"

"Most of it right here at home," Bill would answer—or Tom or Henry, as the case happened to be. "We're fighting a war, you know, and a tolerable big war at that, and it takes a powerful lot of men for the kind of armies this war calls for. We can plan and plan till we are black in the face, but there's just one upshot of it all—and that is, the town people have got to turn out in droves and harvest the crops when the time comes."

"I don't like that idea," the farmer would frequently say.

"Neither do I," Bill would frankly admit, "but it's better than being licked by the Germans." To which the farmer always agreed.

The County Agents have been of very valuable service to farmers in securing help. Last year these agents placed on farms more than 100,000 men, and this year they are giving even greater assistance. But they have always had in mind the policy which the Department has pursued consistently since America entered the war—to tell the farmers frankly that town volunteers will be necessary during harvests and other rush periods, and that in no other way, under present conditions, can a sufficient supply of help be expected during such seasons. At first there was a rather general thought in the Nation that the Government could and would "furnish" sufficient labor or "find" sufficient labor for all the farmers at all times—that is, to arrange things so farm help could be obtained under war-time conditions just as under peace-time conditions. Just how this was to be done no one was kind enough to state—and the Department was unable to find any magicians in its employ! As a result of persistent presentations of the plain facts the Department finally succeeded in

County
Agents find
help.

dissipating this strange notion and in establishing almost everywhere a willingness on the part of the farmers to use town volunteers and a zealously on the part of town people to go to the fields when needed.

FARM HELP SPECIALISTS.

State Farm
Help
Specialists
active.

This general scheme required a great deal of preliminary organization. The Department placed in practically every State a Farm Help Specialist, who works in co-operation with the Agricultural College, the County Agents, Council of Defense, State and Federal labor offices, and other agencies. They ascertain the needs of the farmers, locate sources of supply of labor, and assist the County Agents in securing and placing farm help. Throughout the Nation the co-operation of Chambers of Commerce and business men's organizations, Rotary Clubs, etc., has been secured, and in most towns these organizations have conducted campaigns for volunteers for farm work in their sections.

TOWN PEOPLE "PITCHING IN" TO HELP.

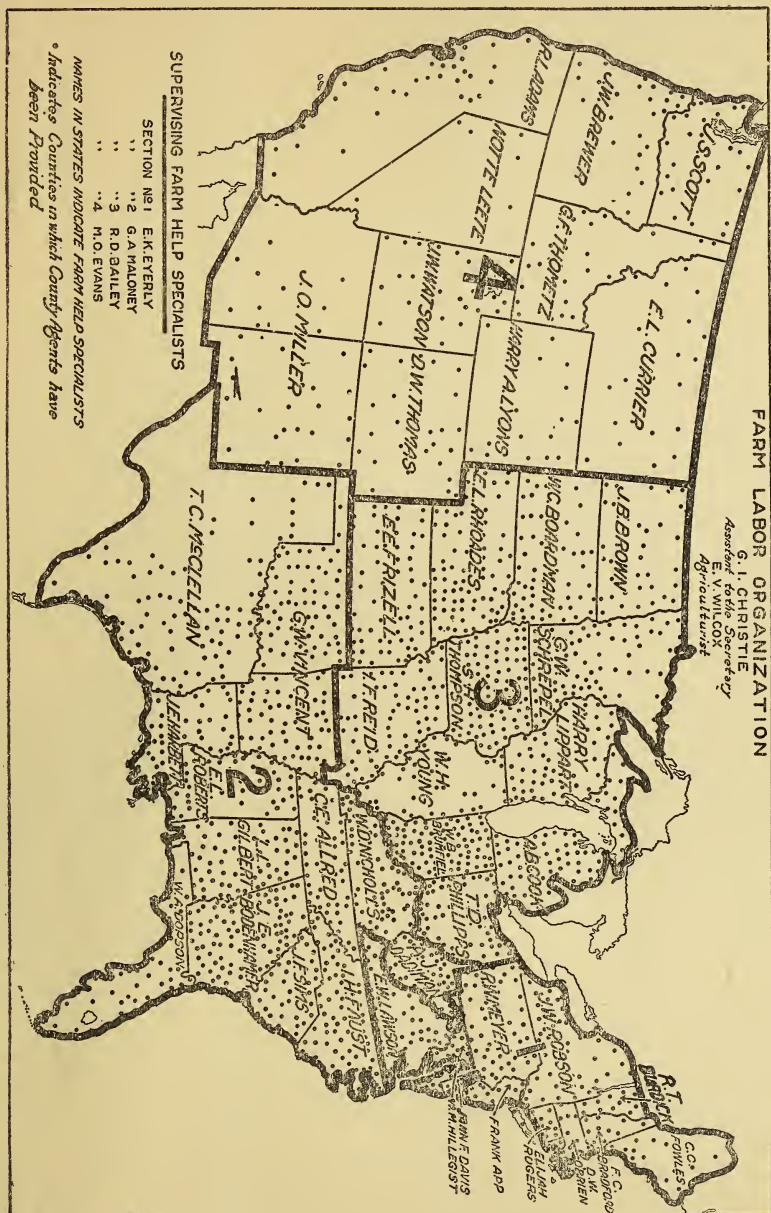
The result has been the saving of great food crops that otherwise could not have been harvested. This summer a great many towns all over the country, but more especially in the grain belt, have simply "shut up shop" during the harvest in order that every person physically qualified for the work could go to the fields of the county and help save the crops.

Armies of
town men
aiding.

Kansas made an especially notable record. During the harvesting of more than 9½ million acres of wheat in that State the greater part of the thought and action of the people was given to the harvest. Forty thousand town people helped, and the crop was saved. Kansas City, alone, enlisted more than 10,000 workers to assist Kansas farmers, and these men not only offered their services, but, under the direction of the Athletic Club and the Chamber of Commerce, they took a course of training to harden and fit them for the work they were to undertake. In addition to the men volunteers, many women went from the towns and cities to assist the farmers' wives in cooking for the army of harvesters.

"Shock
troops."

In Indiana 24 towns secured an enrollment of 9,000 harvest hands for the wheat and oats. Illinois has more than 50,000 workers in 60 counties registered for the harvest. The Mayor and Board of Public Works of one of the large middle western cities closed their offices and worked in the wheat fields, the Mayor driving a binder and his fellow officials shocking the grain. In most of the middle western States "shock troops" and "twilight squads" were organized—men who had to stay in town most of the day, but who would go out about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, in automobiles, and shock wheat or do other work until night—and longer if the moon was shining. These squads supplemented the town volunteers who were able to put in full days in the field. And they did good work, too. For instance, in one evening alone, 40 "twilight troopers" shocked more than 80 acres of wheat.



The potato crop of Houston and Wharton counties, Texas, has been saved through the aid of the business men in the local towns. In response to explanations of the situation made by the State Extension Director and the U. S. Department's Farm Help Specialist, the business men closed their offices, stores and banks, so that their employes might go to the fields—and the business men who were physically fit went themselves.

Women and
girls also
assist.

In the berry district south of Portland, Oreg., a large amount of help was needed to harvest the crop. The Farm Help Specialist in Portland enlisted the services of about 1,000 women and girls, who were organized into units, taken to the berry districts, and assisted satisfactorily in harvesting the crop.

In the sugar-beet districts of Southern Michigan, Colorado, and Utah many thousands of workers have been secured for the cultivation of that important crop.

The War Department has given consideration to suggestions of the Department of Agriculture and has attempted, to the extent that conditions have allowed, to give as much regard as possible to agricultural labor. One thing, however, is more important than anything else—and that is fighting men to win the war. Talk as much as we please about what will "win the war," the one and only certain way is to kill German soldiers in battle. To that general end there are various indispensable needs, but after all is said and done, the Army comes first and the first thing the Army must have is men.

WORK OR FIGHT.

The "work or fight" order of the War Department, which became effective July 1, will assist very materially in all labor problems, including that of farm help. By this order all men registered under the Selective Service Act must be engaged in a useful occupation or they will, at once, be put into the Army. This does not mean that soda jerkers, theater pilots, and fortune tellers, for instance, will flock to farms in appreciable numbers. But it does mean that these and other nonuseful workers will hunt useful jobs and replace in town employment men who do have farm knowledge or aptitude and who want to help on the farms in this emergency. The ultimate effect of the "work or fight" order will mean more help available for the farmers.

Farm-bred
men released
from town
work.

For many months the U. S. Department of Agriculture has been campaigning to create a "work or fight" public sentiment in each community of the country—a public sentiment that will scorn the man who fritters away his time and effort and doesn't do something useful in such a time as this. The War Department order now applies that principle to men of draft age. Public sentiment everywhere should continue to apply it to every man of every age—should insist, although surely that will rarely be necessary, that every man do something worth while, do whatever he can best do to promote the common cause.

SAVING LABOR BY USING MACHINES.

The Farm Help Specialists are encouraging the use of labor-saving farm machinery. One man with four horses and a two-moldboard plow can plow as much land as two men each with a team and single moldboard plow; one man with a two-row corn cultivator and three horses can cultivate as much corn as two men each with a team and single-row cultivator; one man following a binder with a bundle carrier attachment can shock as much wheat as two men following a binder which drops the sheaves in a row as it ties them; the milking machine, the self-feeder for hogs, the manure spreader, the corn husker, and many other machines and other pieces of equipment can be used to great advantage in meeting the present labor situation.

Bigger
machines
and more
power.

BETTER METHODS AND BETTER CROP SYSTEMS.

The Farm Help Specialists are advocating the use of more efficient methods in the cultivation and handling of crops. On one farm it was found that to produce an acre of corn 18 man hours and 47 hours of horse labor were required, while on another farm 69 man hours and 70 horse hours were used. The employment of better methods will permit the second man to produce his crop with a great deal less man labor. Similar results can be secured in the production of wheat and other crops. In the handling of live stock it is possible to use equipment and so to arrange the feed lots that a large saving in labor can be made.

Suggestions of the most desirable cropping systems for farms are made. If a farm is planted to corn alone, then the breaking of the land and the planting of the crop must be done in a short space of time in the spring. This requires a large number of men and a large amount of horse power. Since this crop must be cultivated throughout the summer season, a large amount of labor is required for that work also. On the other hand, if part of this land is planted to winter wheat, then the preparation of the land and the seeding of the crop come during August and September, when there is little to be done with the corn crop. Such a system permits the carrying throughout the entire crop season of the minimum amount of labor, which is employed to good advantage all the time.

Distributing
work through
the season.

UNITED ACTION INCREASES LABOR POWER.

The Farm Help Specialists are giving much time to the organizing of farmers into companies and co-operative associations for the harvesting and handling of their crops. The pooling of the labor of three, five, or ten farms in a way that permits these people to handle their crops in a satisfactory manner has reduced considerably the demand for extra labor at the time of planting and harvest.

Farm Help Specialists are assisting in the organizing and training of boys for farm work. This help can be employed to advantage for many of the lighter tasks on the farms and is meaning much in meeting the present needs.

Co-operative
harvesting.

EMPLOYMENT BY THE YEAR HOLDS HELP.

Good men
want steady
work.

The present farm-labor problem emphasizes the need of a more permanent supply of labor. This can be materially helped through the employment of men by the year. The present practice of many farmers of employing men during the crop season and dismissing them for the winter months allows the farm laborers to take employment in the cities, where in many cases they remain and are thus lost from the farm. Good, efficient farm help should be employed in agricultural work for the entire year. Permanent farm work appeals to and holds on the farm the highest class of labor.

MARRIED MEN DEPENDABLE.

Entire family
available.

Again, much can be done to solve the labor problem by employing married men. Recently an advertisement in an Indiana paper for farm help brought applications from 30 men. Twenty-eight of these were married. They wished to move their families to the country. They wished to get away from the high living expenses of the city and to get into the country, where they could have a garden, a cow, some chickens, and a pig or two. They wished, too, to have opportunity for the boys and girls to do some work amid healthful surroundings.

Where married men are employed in the country and their families live on the farm there is opportunity for the wife to help in the home of the farm owner with the laundry work, cooking, and other household duties. This assistance in the farm home is as necessary as is help with the crops and the stock. Boys and girls of these families can do many chores and light tasks and thus release the men for the regular work.

LIVE-STOCK FARMING DESIRABLE.

Live stock
helps solve
farm labor
problem.

Married men employed on farms should have work for the entire year. This in many sections involves the keeping of live stock. At this time when there is a great need for meat, wool, and dairy products, American farmers should plan to keep more live stock. The keeping of live stock assists not only in meeting the needs for food and clothing, but it means much in maintaining the fertility of the soil and insuring permanent agriculture. Again, this system of farming distributes the labor throughout the year and thus relieves the extreme demand that comes during the summer months where simply a crop system of farming is followed.

MORE HOUSES REQUIRED.

Comfortable
homes for
workers.

There is at this time a need for a larger number of comfortable homes for the tenants and hired help on the farms. The old shack which was simply a place in which to exist will no longer satisfy the workers. For the appearance of the farm and the beautification of the country, suitable, comfortable homes should be built and maintained. The building of houses for the help will allow many farmers, instead of moving to town, to remain in their own homes on the farms, where they can render the greatest assistance to the community and to agriculture.

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